THE MIRACLE OF WELCOME HOME
FOR THE BLIND

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The miracle of Welcome Home for the Blind

THE WELCOME HOME

Limited numbers and limited resources proved no handicap for Grand Rapids DGs

⚓ THE story of "Welcome Home" is the story of the first home for aged blind to be established in the state of Michigan. The first anniversary of its opening will be April 6, 1953. It is located at 227 Charles Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan. The story of its beginning and accomplishment is a tale of the Delta Gamma Alumnæ of Grand Rapids working hand in hand with the blind people of Michigan for four years to achieve their greatest dream. It largely concerns Estelle Stillson Waterman (Mrs. Phil, Alpha Omicron) who, as one of the founders of the home, gave constantly her time and abilities to make the home a reality. Here is the whole unbelievable tale as Estelle has told it to me.

"As President of the Delta Gamma Alumnæ in 1948, I became acquainted with Mrs. Henry Soerhiede, a blind woman, who has really been the moving spirit in the promotion of this home. She has been a member of a state blind organization for years and realized that blind people in Michigan were not being accepted in other homes for the aged because of their affliction. After she proposed this project to her state organization in 1948, she began to work toward her goal with a zeal so intense that anyone who came in contact with her could not help but feel drawn into it.

"At this same time, I was looking for a project to give our local Delta Gamma chapter a new interest. I met her at the home of a mutual friend and, before I knew it, was drawn in and intensely interested in helping. I presented it at our next meeting, and we agreed that this was something really worthwhile. At the time we had only twenty active members. We knew that a project of such large dimensions would require about $50,000 to get started. It looked very remote, but we could, for the moment, at least give it our moral support.

"We sponsored a bridge luncheon, the proceeds of which were only $30. Later we helped the blind people of the city give a party, at which they netted about $270. It all seemed like so little in the great ocean of their need. However, the blind people are never still. Before long I was invited to attend a state meeting of the blind. There I was asked to become Vice-President of a non-profit corporation set up to receive money for the fulfillment of this project. Of this original corporate organization, three were blind and two were sighted. The president, Craig Davids, is a very successful blind attorney; the treasurer, Elizabeth Hines, is a blind ex-

perennial problem—there's so much we want to tell, to shout about, and so little time in which to do it.

On these next pages, therefore, we offer a slight taste of the wonderful things which are going on in the growing alumnæ world. There are more in our files at this very moment which we wanted to include, but for those we'll wait 'til the next issue of *The Anchora.*

There was a day when the word "actives" was coined when "actives" were called active because they were just that and the alumnæ were possibly a little sedentary. Turn these pages, and you'll agree with us—in 1953 *everybody's active!*

THEY'RE BUSY EVERYWHERE—(left) in Tulsa one DG alumnæ project is sponsoring the sight conservation class at Riverview School. Here are Mary Mahin Moyers (Mrs. Donald P., Alpha Kappa) and Georgia Martin, teacher of the class, with three of the children. And (below) in Tacoma DG alumnæ teach swimming to blind children—among this group you'll find (far left) Mrs. John Carver, (center foreground) Donna Haskell Daulph (Mrs. James, Beta) and (right) Mary Thomas Lyle (Mrs. W. B., Beta).

teacher; the secretary is my friend, Mrs. Eva Pearse. Mrs. Soerheide became a resident agent for the purpose of interpreting the needs of the state blind organization to us.

"Now we were legally set up to receive money, and from then on the five members of the corporation had monthly meetings. We discussed ways and means of obtaining money, made by-laws, and talked of the way the home would be run once it was established. Between meetings we contacted local philanthropists, men's service clubs, and women's clubs for help. However, it was difficult to interest people in something that was only an idea.

"Finally after three years, in May 1951, the corporation inherited $6,000 from the estate of a blind woman, Mrs. Eva Bellisle of Grand Haven, Michigan. It was then that the miracle of the blind people's faith was shown to me. Nothing could stop them once the estate had been settled, and the money was in the bank.

"In August 1951 we purchased the home on Charles Street, paying $1000 down with a land contract settlement of $80 a month. The house was perfect in size, intended to care for fifteen people and a sighted couple as caretakers. However, it was about 65 years old, had only one bathroom upstairs, needed a new roof, furnace, carpeting, furniture, appliances, and other repairs. My very practical soul was filled with dread when I saw the peeling wallpaper, cracked ceilings, and paintless woodwork. And so it happened that I worked as chairman of the building committee and was responsible for all of the remodeling. We added two bathrooms, enlarged the dining area, purchased carpets, furniture, appliances, and installed safety equipment.

"People began to hear about the home before long, and Captain Walter Gilbert of the Grand Rapids Police Department appeared at the home one day. He said, 'Mrs. Waterman, I represent the Fraternal Order of Police, an organization of 250 men, who stand in back of me in my desire to help you by giving time to remodel and do rough carpentry work free. Now tell me, what has to be done?'

"I was astonished and, with many misgivings, showed him through the house and told him our plans for converting two unused spaces into bathrooms, and of extending the dining room wall to make adequate space. After I had finished he told me that he had men capable of doing every type of carpentry work and said that if I would give him a key, he would have twelve men start in the next Monday morning to tear down the walls.

"I could hardly wait until Monday morning to see what would happen. When I arrived the place where the dining room wall should have been was a gaping hole, and two grinning policemen in their work clothes were busily tearing away the last remaining bits of plaster and lumber. Others were working cheerfully on the walls for the bathrooms. The place was filled with plaster and dust, but I was happy and thrilled. Through the following months, these men continued working until they had completed the rough carpentry to rebuild the walls. During this period, I purchased the lumber and materials needed and learned to know a group of wonderful men, who give their time and strength to make others happy.

"Then the second miracle happened. The leader of the Decorators Division of the American Federation of Labor came to me through Captain Gilbert. The result of our conversation was the offer of his men to continue with the work of plastering and finishing the remodeling, plus the offer to completely paint and redecorate free. That night the Police Department

DGs IN THE WELCOME HOME GUILD—standing, Ellen Lerg Miller (Mrs. James C., Beta Xi); Jaqueline Miller Kramer (Mrs. George W., Beta Tau), and Sally Ripley Teevan (Mrs. James F., Sigma). Seated are Estelle Stillson Waterman (Mrs. Phil L., Alpha Omicron) and Charlotte Moss Plekker (Mrs. Johannes D., Xi).

SOME OF THE RESIDENTS

cleaned up all of the mess they had made to make room for the new crew of workmen.

"When the paint colors and wallpaper had been selected, the AFL Union took over, and the face-lifting of an old but essentially beautiful house began. The lovely old butternut woodwork glowed softly after it had been sanded and varnished. The walls were clean with new coats of paint or paper. These men worked happily, and the house was lovely as a result of their labor, given in pure love toward humanity.

"I was delighted, but realized that the house was still empty. We had no furniture, carpeting, appliances, curtains or kitchenware. $3,500 of our $6,000 was already gone for materials and down payment. Once again the way was opened by another group of wonderful men. The Lion's Club of Grand Rapids asked me to present our project to their Board of Directors at one of their Tuesday evening dinners. The results were fantastic. They completely furnished the home by a gift of $1,000.

"Every Tuesday at their luncheon meetings for three weeks, they had a shower for the home and brought things from their own homes. If they lacked something to bring, they wrote more checks, this time from their own pockets. The money rose to $1,700, and I was asked to buy through them all of the furnishings. I did. They cut the prices to half or less. One man brought a beautiful light fixture for the hall. Another gave $150 worth of lumber to complete the carpentry work. In six weeks the house was furnished with new hollywood beds, dressers, and a beautiful recorder and radio combination, all through their generosity.

"The Delta Gammas furnished the lovely gold draperies for the living and dining rooms and made many of the valences themselves. Even our husbands got interested and helped with the furnishing. Jim Teevan purchased the dining room tables and chairs, and my husband, Phil, purchased all of the appliances wholesale and arranged delivery. Beta Xi chapter at Michigan State made place mats which they sent.

"Shortly before the home opened, Louise Ashley Black (Mrs. Noel, Zeta) organized a group of volunteers from our group for the purpose of housecleaning. They scrubbed, cleaned, and vacuumed until the house glistened. Those who pitched in with this important task were Mary Dooge Ballard (Mrs. Milner, Jr., Xi), Jacqueline Miller Kramer (Mrs. George W., Beta Tau), Josephine Patton McCobb (Mrs. Edward C., Xi), Mildred Herrick Batts (Mrs. W. Harold, Pi), Barbara Patton Heaney (Mrs. Robert C., Xi), and Louise Black.

"This is not all the Delta Gammas accomplished during this time. Sally Ripley Teevan (Mrs. James F., Sigma), who had been the Delta Gamma working closest with me, conceived the idea of forming a guild of women to give services to the blind people. We agreed that this would be a final, wonderful miracle to make the welcome complete for those who would come from all over the state to live here. We decided not to wait until the house opened, and on March 7, 1952 Sally and I organized a nucleus of Delta Gammas and close friends who were interested. We met in the old house, still unfurnished, for the momentous occasion of the forming of the 'Welcome Home Service League.' We sat on folding chairs while carpenters hammered and sawed. There were news photographers taking pictures and asking questions, but somehow in the midst of it all, we put over an idea to eighteen women which found fulfillment in the succeeding months. Sally became the League President, and her work was cut out for her immediately. She was helped by six other Delta Gammas who became members. Charlotte Moss Plekker (Mrs. J. D., Xi), an excellent organizer who came to us from Detroit, was vice-president. Others who were present at the forming of the guild include Geraldine Gates Van Riessen (Mrs. Robt. H., Theta), Jacqueline Miller Kramer (Mrs. George W., Beta Tau), Ellen Lerg Miller (Mrs. James C., Beta Xi), Louise Ashley Black (Mrs. Noel, Zeta), and myself.

"Our first job as a guild was to be hostesses at the formal opening of the home, which was

just one month later. On Palm Sunday, April 6, 1952, the opening was held and attended by about 300 people, one third of whom were blind.

"The Board of Directors of the home, which by this time included twelve members, was able to attend as guests with no responsibilities, due to the expert job done by Sally and the guild. They greeted and served the guests, and became from then on a team who gave invaluable service to the blind people.

"Now the home is almost full. There are twelve women and two men who have come from places as far away as Iron Mountain, Michigan. The home is maintained by each one of them paying a large part of their income from Social Security, or about $55 a month. These people have brought some of their own personal belongings to add charm to the home. The guild members have come to know them all personally because each one of them takes her turn driving the blind people once a month. This includes trips for shopping, visiting, doctor's appointments, and many other things.

"This year the guild plans a Christmas party for the home with a tree and individual gifts for each person. We DGs, who have done our part to make this home possible, are grateful for the wonderful opportunity that we have been given. We are grateful to Delta Gamma for broadening our world as women through our mutual interest in those who cannot see."

When your next Anchora is late—

it's really not late at all! Though your next *Anchora* (usually called "May") will arrive at your house early in June, it won't be off schedule but on a completely new one. The new publication dates, starting with this summer issue, will be as follows:

SUMMER—to appear during the first week in **June**

FALL—to appear during the first week in **September**

WINTER—to appear during the first week in **December**

SPRING—to appear during the first week in **March**

This means that as of this date we will observe the following deadline schedule:

For the **SUMMER** issue—all copy must be in the hands of the editor no later than **April 15.** (No chapter letters)

For the **FALL** issue—collegiate chapter letters will appear and can be accepted no later than **July 5.** All other copy must be in the hands of the editor by **July 15.**

For the **WINTER** issue—alumnæ association letters will appear and can be accepted no later than **October 5.** All other copy must be in the hands of the editor by **October 15.**

For the **SPRING** issue—alumnæ chapter letters will appear and can be accepted no later than **January 5.** All other copy must be in the hands of the editor by **January 15.**

And may we repeat—all copy must be typed on one side of the paper only, double-spaced. Members will be identified as follows—if they are unmarried, Mary Smith, Alpha Alpha; if they are married, Mary Smith Homes (Mrs. John, Alpha Alpha). Letters not adhering to this rule cannot be accepted. Chapter letters of more than two typewritten pages will be cut to within this limit.

Planning and determination and the right route bring a DG dream to reality—

Kansas City has a Nursery School for the Blind

By CHARLINE JOHNSON SLASON, *Beta Kappa*

⚓ THROUGH cooperation of three city organizations, the Kansas City Nursery School for the Blind has emerged from a persistent hope into a reality.

The Junior League, Delta Gamma alumnæ and Kansas City Association for the Blind are maintaining joint sponsorship of this school, the first such nursery ever to be provided in Greater Kansas City. It is evidence of the advantages gained when more than one organization work together for the success of a single project.

The nursery was opened this fall and has 12 children from three to five years of age enrolled. Quarters are furnished by the Country Club Congregational Church. As playmates and guides in nursery activities, there are five children with normal sight, the sons and daughters of members of the congregation, also attending the sessions. The presence of the sighted children is intended to set a pattern for the future associations in which these blind youngsters will be with normal, active boys and girls.

Hours for this pre-school are from 9 to 11 o'clock on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. They are held in the church Sunday school nursery but some additional equipment has been provided by various contributors of the organizations. The age limit is three to six years and it is believed two or three more children will be eligible for enrollment within a few weeks. There is no charge to the parents of any of the children enrolled. However, there are still several blind youngsters in the community who are not enrolled because of parental attitude, lack of transportation or other reasons.

The idea for this pre-school was actually instigated by Mrs. Ann Harford, district supervisor for the Missouri Bureau for the Blind. She discussed the need with members of the board of the Kansas City Association for the Blind of whom three are Delta Gammas: Frances Alexander Hecker (Mrs. Robert L., Mu), Lydia Tilden Hake (Mrs. Newton, Tau) and Ruth Bywater Olson (Mrs. Robert A., Mu). Knowing of the Delta Gamma national project work, Mrs. Harford felt that a nursery here was more certain of success because of the presence of this alumnæ group. The idea was presented to the

GENE PROTZMAN, KC alumnæ executive board member for the past six years, does her stint.

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